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QUINTESSENCE OF GANDHISM

FUTURE FOR THE MORALLY FITTEST

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THE SUNDAY TIMES OFFICE,

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QUINTESSENCE • OF GANDHISM

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"Innocence must rejoice on the scaffold." This little sentence contains the quintessence of Gandhism as a tiny seed contains that of a tree.

The guilty never willingly suffer, though suffer they must as a consequence of their own guilt. The natural process that one reaps as one sows is a perversion in their eye. That is why we always see the wicked people crying in the name of God for the blood of their punishers.

A man may be innocent of a particular crime he is charged with, but if he takes an adverse decision with a curse on his lips and a violent agitation in his heart, he cannot be said to be innocent. The test of real innocence is the one prescribed by Gandhiji.

The application of that test may lead us to the painful discovery that there is not one in the 1,800 millions that people this earth who comes near the standard. But this failure does not involve the break-down of the theory. There is no failure for an ideal; the failure is in the followers. This point has been beautifully clinched by Mahatmaji himself.

When Rabindranath Tagore taunted him by pointing out that the Non-co-operation theory requiring students to come out of schools and colleges broke down the moment most of them went back to their studies, Gandhiji wrote in reply: "It is no argument against the soundness of the proposition laid down by me that the vast majority of students went back after the first flush of enthusiasm. Their recantation is proof

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rather of the extent of our degradation than of the wrongness of the step."

This view does not preclude discussion as to the soundness or otherwise of an ideal. Blind belief is dangerous; it is more harmful than no belief at all. Especially in the matter of an ideal,—because it seeks to employ every bit of its follower in his journey towards it,—blind acceptance amounts to suicide. It is just like one going beyond one's depth and getting drowned. If it is a deliberate venture, the case is one calling for pity; but if it is the result of idiocy, blindness, the person involved is served right. The man who does not make use of his invaluable gift of thinking is an idler of the worst sort, and as such his progress is backward.

Now, let us see whether Innocence really rejoices on the scaffold. Sri Rama gives the answer. When he was sent into exile by Kaikeyi for no guilt of his, how did he take it? He did not dissolve in tears nor did he show the least trace of ill-will or resentment, but welcomed it as though he was being offered a long-sought boon. He was Innocence itself, and therefore he rejoiced to go on the scaffold—his going into the forests meant nothing less.

All the world's martyrs, who were either impaled or burnt, met their end with a cheerful face. They were all innocent. Their only crime was they found themselves in the midst of wicked people, and for that they paid the highest penalty with a glad heart.

The beauty of their sufferings would have been entirely lost, if they had shown the least unwillingness to be slaughtered. Let it not be thought for a moment that their cheer was born out of despair. They could have escaped all the terrible sufferings for the mere asking by uttering a single word of recantation. The liberty they could thus purchase was a positive bondage to them. That would be just like leaving God to serve Satan. That knowledge alone

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was enough to keep them steadfast. But they also knew that to suffer for an ideal was the best service they could render humanity. The purer the suffering the greater is the hold the ideal gets over the people. No suffering can be pure without the entire absence of anger, resentment and ill-will. Even a little bit of unwillingness is enough to make it impure and therefore useless.

Miracle of Good Habits

To reach such a state of innocence one has to undergo a *severe* process of self-purification. The word *severe* need not frighten any one. Gandhiji's process does not require our giving up of the world altogether. All that it requires is that one should be truthful, courageous and non-violent in daily dealings.

Those who think that without troubling themselves they would one day arrive at perfection are only unconsciously cheating themselves. That is the idlest dream possible. You cannot get anything for nothing. That is the first principle of existence. To be truthful may look very easy: it is not really so. "By the practice of truth, truth is obtained" says Guru Nanak. So you cannot come into possession of any virtue without striving for it. The striving takes the shape of habit-forming. Thus the process of self-purification reduces itself into a set of good habits.

What Mahatma Gandhi is to-day is the result of good habits. He has not the least doubt that any one constantly practising truth, non-violence, continence and fearlessness will ultimately reach the highest destiny. This is what he says on those four virtues :

1. *The Vow of Truth*—It is not enough that one ordinarily does not resort to untruth; one ought to know that no deception may be practised even for the good of the country, that truth may require opposition to one's parents and elders. Consider the example of Prahalad.

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2. *The Vow of Ahimsa*—It is not enough not to take the life of any living being. The follower of this vow may not hurt even those whom he believes to be unjust; he may not be angry with them, he must love them; thus he would oppose the tyranny whether of parents, governments or others, but will never hurt the tyrant. The follower of Truth and *Ahimsa* will conquer the tyrant by love, he will not carry out the tyrant's will but he will suffer punishment even unto death for disobeying his will until the tyrant himself is conquered.

3. *The Vow of Celibacy*—It is well nigh impossible to observe the foregoing two vows unless celibacy is also observed; for this vow it is not enough that one does not look upon another woman with a lustful eye, he has so to control his animal passions that they will not be moved even in thought: if he is married he will not have a carnal mind regarding his wife; but considering her as his life-long friend, will establish with her the relationship of perfect purity.

4. *Fearlessness*—He who is acted upon by fear can hardly follow Truth or *Ahimsa*. A truly fearless man will defend himself against others by truth force or soul force.

Who Will Survive?

What separates man from the brute is his will power. He can go the way he pleases. This freedom can be exercised either for his progress towards divinity or for his utter fall. When he falls he falls far below even the brute level, for he has neither the physical strength nor the unerring instincts of the brute. His salvation lies in getting away from the brute as far as possible. It is for that purpose he is given his will power.

When man first appeared on this planet he differed very little from his brute ancestor. But centuries after centuries saw gradual internal progress in him. The evolution of hi will made him conscious of a higher power in him than his physical strength. That was the beginning of his intellectual

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life. Then came the struggle for the survival of the fittest, not physically but intellectually. And now, says Gandhiji, is the struggle for the survival of the morally fittest.

" As Darwin admits," Gandhiji says, " moral strength is even superior to intellectual strength. The morally fit alone can ultimately survive in the world. Some people are under the impression that Darwin taught the supremacy of merely physical laws, and that, therefore, the moral law has no place in the working of universe. But this is an altogether false notion. A study of the history of the world teaches us the great truth that the moral law is written on the 'tablets of Eternity.' 'Truth and Justice alone endure and live.' Falsehood and Injustice may be long lived, but dooms-day comes at last to them in French Revolutions and other terrible ways. As Darwin points out, there is the moral instinct amongst the lower animals, as shown by the fact that even the most timid animals fearlessly stand up for their young ones, and try to save them at the cost of their own lives. Indeed, if all animals were not equally liable to the moral laws, all life would become extinct, and the whole world would be turned into a desert. Man's superiority is bassed on the fact that his moral sense is keener and more highly developed than in the lower animals, and he is capable of sacrificing his life for the sake of his family, as well as his community or country. Hence we see that, even according to Darwin's principle of " the survival of the fittest " man is bound to be guided in all his actions by moral considerations. His greatness is based neither on accumulated treasures nor on destructive armaments, but solely on rightousness and veracity."

Man of the Future

Most of us have been taught to believe that mankind is on the decline, fast approaching its annihilation. That this is an erroneous notion it is not difficult to show. There will be no meaning in creation if the principle of evolution does not

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work upward. On the physical side of Life, man represnts the highest miracle of organisation attainable. As he had to struggle ages after ages to evolve that wonderful bodily organ the eye, he is to struggle again to evolve a mind's eye, which shall guide him in the spiritual world as is bodily eye guides him in this. Not that that struggle has begun only now. It began ages ago, but it will not be over until every man and woman is born with a mind's eye as well. When we are in the midst of this struggle it is ridiculous to suggest that human race has ceased to progress. The truth is: the Best is yet to be. If mankind has become decadent past redemption, there is no need for great men to appear again and again to keep up Life's upward struggle.

The real quest of man being spiritual, it will be sheer waste of time and energy for him to store up the goods of this world. He needs a little and that for a little time. Love of wealth is the root of all evil. It makes a man selfish, and selfishness causes all the misery in the world. So, Gandhiji says that all men should " regard it as a sin to amass wealth And then there would be no inequalities of wealth and consequently, no famine or starvation."

But he knows only too well that inequalities of wealth are not to be easily abolished. Perhaps the division of people into rich and poor will continue for ever. But happily poverty is no bar to the achievement of virtues which mark man higher than brute. In a sense, poverty aids man's progress towards divinity. That is why Christ said : " Blessed are the poor," and, " it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to get into Heaven." This, however, must not be taken to mean that poverty is in itself welcome or that it is a passport to Heaven. All that is meant therein is that one's state of poverty gives one a good start in the race to Perfection.

That advantage is, however, more often rejectedt han taken. The poor want to be rich : the fetters of gold are alluring

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Fully aware of this weakness in them, Gandhiji has taken their side—to lead them politically, socially and spiritually. When he speaks of the Swaraj of the poor, he does not mean that the poor will be turned into wealthy classes, but he only guarantees enough food and clothing and a decent place to live in—in other words, the elimination of the brutalising factors of poverty. And these amenities of a wholesome life the poor are to get not for nothing but in return for a wholesome labour.

"To a people famishing and idle," says Gandhiji, "the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves." If the idle rich are thieves, equally so are the idle poor.

To possess more than one actually requires acts as a heavy drag. A man in this position is far from doing good either to himself or to others. His superfluous possessions represent a cut in the commonweal, and that cut finally touches him also. The tendency is that once you begin to amass wealth, you go on doing it, absorbing all your time and energy into it, Wealth becomes the end of your life, only to discover, when it is perhaps too late, that you have been gathering and hugging a thing which peremptorily stops this side of your grave. So the attempt should be to possess as little as possible.

The Spiritual Armoury

Non-possession is the starting point. That is the base of spiritual action. The stronger the base the surer the action. But a strong base alone does not ensure success.

Thus vow of poverty alone will not win you success in the spiritual struggle. You must be armed with other vows too.

You must practise non-violence, and that must be your creed whether you are strong or weak Gandhiji says: "Non-

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violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness when there is power to punish : it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpess creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. An average Zulu is any way more than a match for an average English man in bodily capacity. But he flees from an English boy because he fears the boy's revolver or those who will use it for him. He fears death and is nerveless in spite of his burly figure.

"I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—to the strength of the spirit.

"Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil doer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.

"When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm, he will wish him well, he will not swear at him: he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong doer. Thus Non-violence is complete innocence.

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"Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state, we are partly men and partly beasts and in ignorance and even arrogance say that we truly fulfiil the purpose of our species when we deliver blow for blow and develop the measure of anger required for the purpose. We pretend to believe that retaliation is the law of our being, whereas in every scripture we find that retaliation is nowhere obligatory but only permissible. Retaliation is indulgence requiring elaborate regulating. Restraint is the law of our being. For, highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint. Suffering is thus the badge of the human tribe."

Truth and fearlessness go hand in hand. A man who lies is necessarily a coward. And cowardice makes him miserble and wretched. Such a person is rushed in the first round of the struggle for the survival of the morally fittest.

The fourth factor that helps man in his upward struggle is continence. Gandhiji says: "We hardly realise the fact that incontinence is the root cause of all the vanity, anger, fear and jealousy in the world. If our mind is not under our control, if we behave once or more everyday more foolishly than even little children, what sins may we not commit consciously or unconsciously?"

A sexually exhausted man is like a sucked-up lemon, fit only to be thrown on the dust heap in the street. He has nothing to contribute towards the improvement of the race. He has lived in vain and tragically.

Service of humanity is the purpose of this life. To fail in that is to fail to live fully, and profitably. Readiness to suffer, to lose all one has and even to die, is the mark of one who has attained a state of perfection, innocence.

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"The welfare of humanity" says Gandhiji, "is bound up with the pursuit of morality. All the great moral virtues like love, charity, gratitude and patriotism, have for their ultimate end the good of mandkind. In fact, there is not a single virtue which aims at, of is content with, the welfare of the indivividual alone.

"Man is worse than the brute, so long as he his selfish and indifferent to the happiness of others. He rises above the level of the brute, when he begins to work for the welfare of his family. He rises higher in the scale, when he comes to look upon his whole community or race as his own family. He becomes greater still when he begins to regard even the so-called barbarous races as the members of his own family. In other words, man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow men.

"And so long as we do not feel sympathy and love for every one of our fellow-beings, we cannot be said to have understood the moral law. The highest morality is universal. We should render devoted service to the world in every possible way remembering that every one of our brethren has a claim on us. Those who think that they are responsible only to themselves can never be men of high character. It is, of course, a silly and a dangerous notion that the man who does not safeguard his own interests must fail in the struggle for existence. God will never forsake those who devote themselves to the service of others with purity and singleness of aim.

"Man's duty, as we have already seen, is to do unselfish service to others; and he should do such service, not in order to do good to others, but rather because it is the very law of his being.

"Then that man alone can be called truly religious or moral whose mind is not tainted with hatred or selfishness, and who leads a life of absolute purity and of disinterested service; and that man alone can be truly wealthy or happy

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either. Only such men can do good to mankind ; for truth is the foundation of all that is good and great. To a true servant of humanity the question never arises as to the best form of service. When we have realised the majesty of the moral law, we shall see how little our happiness or unhappiness depends on health, and success and fame, and the like. As has been finely said by Emerson, even the pains and griefs of good men contribute to their happiness, while even the wealth and fame of bad men cause misery to themselves as well as to the world.

" Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you. "

Too much worldly possession is considered in all religions as an impediment to human advancement. In other words mere storing up of wealth for its own sake is soul-killing, for such storage of wealth is not possible without defrauding others. If you get more than you require so that you may help the deserving poor, no blame attaches to you. There are stories, which tell us that some religiously-minded men of yore resorted to thieving and robbing, when they found they had nothing with them, to feed the poor and disabled. These men might not have really existed but the stories contain a moral, namely, that service of humanity is the highest purpose of life, and even dishonourable means to achieve that are condoned. But Mahatma Gandhi differs strongly as regards the means. He would have absolutely nothing to do with impure means. He says : " It ever has been my purpose to show that dishonourable means cannot bring about an honourable end."

The following passages from Gandhiji's writings clear three important points that so often crop up in our individual life.

" Now-a-days it has become the fashion with some young men to adopt the superior attitude and pose as paragons of perfection. In my opinion the maintenance of one's aged and infirm parents is a first charge upon grown-up

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sons. They may not marry if they are not in a position to support their parents. They may not take up public work till this primary condition is fulfilled. They must starve so that their parents may be fed and clothed. What however, young men are not expected to do is to comply with the demand of thoughtless or ignorant parents. Parents have been known to demand money for things not required for sustenance but for false show or for uncalled-for marriage expenses of daughters. In my opinion it is the duty of public workers respectfully to refuse to meet such demands."

"I cannot remember having met a single deserving case of starvation of a public worker. I have found some living in want. I have found a few who should get more than they are able to give themselves. But as their work prospers and their worth is known they will not suffer from want. Difficulties and trials make a man. They are a sign of healthy growth. If every young man found himself in plenty and never knew what it was to go without anything necessary, he may be found wanting when the trial comes. Sacrifice is joy."

"Self-help is the capacity to stand on one's legs without anybody's help. This does not mean indifference to or rejection of outside help, but it means the capacity to be at peace with oneself, to preserve one's self-respect, when outside help is not forthcoming or is refused. A farmer who, rejecting friends' help, insists on tilling his own soil, making his own implements, gathering his own harvest, spinning and weaving his own cloth and building his own house, all by himself, must be either foolish or self-conceited or barbarous. Self-help includes bread-labour and means that every man shall earn his bread in the sweat of his brow. Hence a man who works in his field for eight hours daily is entitled to help from the weaver, the carpenter, the blacksmith or the mason. It is not only his right, it is his duty to seek the help of these, and they in their turn benefit by the agriculturist's

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labour in the field. The eye that would dispense with the help of the hands does not practise self-help, but is conceited and self-deceived. And as the different members of the body are self-reliant so far as their own functions are concerned and yet are mutually helpful and mutually dependent, so are we three hundred million members of the Indian body politic, each following the rule of self-help in performing his own function, and yet co-operating with one another in all matters of common interest. Only then can we be said to be servants of the country and only then do we deserve to be called nationalists."

"My *Ahimsa* would not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way, and if I had the power I would stop every *Sadavart* where free meals are given. It has degraded the nation and it has encouraged laziness, idleness, hypocrisy and even crime. Such misplaced charity adds nothing to the wealth of the country, whether material or spiritual, and gives a false sense of meritoriousness to the donor. How nice and wise it would be if the donor were to open institutions where they would give meals under healthy, clean surroundings to men and women who would work for them. I personally think that the spinning wheel or any of the processes that cotton has to go through will be an ideal occupation. But if they will not have that, they may choose any other work, only the rule should be 'No labour, No meal.' Every city has its own difficult problem of beggars, a problem for which the monied men are responsible. I know that it is easier to fling free meals in the faces of idlers, but much more difficult to organise an institution where honest work has to be done before meals are served. From pecuniary standpoint, in the initial stages at any rate, the cost of feeding people after taking work from them will be more than the cost of the present free kitchens. But I am convinced that it will be cheaper in the long run, if we do not want to increase in

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geometrical progression the race of loafers which is fast overrunning this land."

Service of humanity involves sacrifice and suffering. They flow out of love. Love in any of its forms calls them forth. Without suffering intense inner experience is not possible. Men with a burning desire to know the truth of existence will jump at the cannon's mouth if needed. Consciously dying for truth is the true measure of moral greatness. It was no mean moral courage that was required of Socrates to drain the cup of hemlock with a smile litting his face. He died. But is he really dead? No, he survives still, and will survive for ever. In order to save the 'sinners' Jesus Christ died on the cross with a crown of thorns on his head. The white purity of his sacrifice is there still inspiring millions to noble actions. So was it in the past, and so is it now.

Mahatma Gandhi is now the standing monument of the principle of the survival of the morally fittest. He is the most alive man to-day. He is irrepressible. He is the richest because he is the poorest of the poor. The common notion that to give away is to lose, and to take from others is to save is baseless and false. Gandhiji in his life has proved that. He gave away freely all that he had and he is now given all that he wants. It was an assertion of Swami Vivekananda that money is nothing and man is everything. That assertion is realised in Gandhiji. John Bunyan says:

A man there was, tho' some did count him mad,
The more he cast away, the more he had.

Kesari Printing Works, Madras.